

Issue Brief: African Americans/Blacks and Immigration in the U.S.

Key Words

The Great Migration
Push Factor
Pull Factor
Foreign-Born Black
Low-Skilled Immigrants

Description

This issue brief will cover the African American/Black population's own involvement in immigration as well as its interaction with other immigrant groups and immigration policy in the United States. Also, the brief will discuss particular groups of blacks and their immigration to the U.S. from other countries.

Key Points

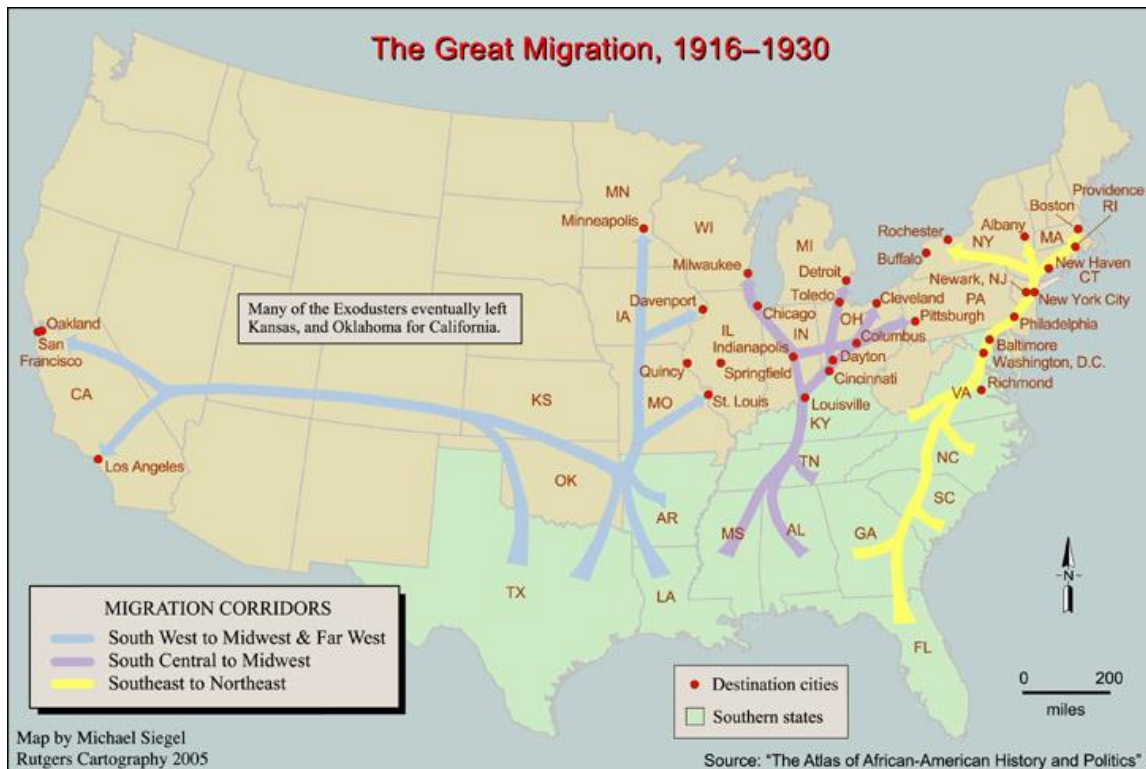
- 1) During The Great Migration, many African Americans/Blacks relocated from southern states to northern states due to a variety of push and pull factors.
- 2) There is a marked tension between Blacks and recent Latino immigrants at the local level due to competition over jobs and government resources.
- 3) African Americans/Blacks generally tend to disagree with larger immigration policy.
- 4) Foreign-born blacks compose the recent wave of black immigrants in America.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, African Americans/Blacks compose 12.2% of the country's population. Though formerly one-dimensional, as the descendants of African slaves brought to America beginning in the early 1600s, growing immigration rates into the US have produced a multifarious Black experience in constant interaction (and conflict) with immigration.

Before the late 1800s African Americans/Blacks resided mainly in the Southern United States as slaves working on plantations. Disillusionment with the promise of freedom and the Emancipation Proclamation, however, dramatically altered the geographical location of this group. Between 1915 and 1970 over 6 million African Americans migrated to the northern and western parts of the country. A variety of push factors and pull factors were the cause of this massive migration. Blacks were "pushed" by Jim Crow law, rampant discrimination, segregation, and disenfranchisement, and lack of employment in the South and "pulled" by growing employment rates, industrialism and relative tolerance in the North. This exodus from the south has been documented in influential narratives such as Isabel Wilkerson's *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*, as African American's first interaction with migration.



A southern family arriving
in Chicago during World
War I. (Chicago
Commission on Race
Relations, The Negro in
Chicago [Chicago, 1922])



Another interaction African Americans/Blacks have had with immigration is their proximity and competition with immigrants from other minority groups, particularly Latinos. Due to high rates of unemployment and poverty among both the Black and Latino population, these two groups often live in the same underserved, urban neighborhoods. As a result, Blacks often must compete directly with Latinos for local low-skill jobs and for shares of government aid. The Federation for American Immigration Reform states, "The high unemployment rate can be partially attributed to the oversupply of low-skilled immigrants. Immigrants arriving since 1990 have increased the supply of labor by 25 percent for the kinds of jobs traditionally taken by poorly educated Americans." The growing number of Latinos, as revealed by the 2010 Census, has only exacerbated this fact. For the first time in history, the 2010 census revealed that Hispanics/Latinos are the largest minority in the United States, outnumbering blacks significantly.

Population of the United States by Race and Hispanic/Latino Origin, Census 2000 and 2010

Race and Hispanic/Latino origin	Census 2010, population	Percent of population	Census 2000, population	Percent of population
Total Population	308,745,538	100.0%	281,421,906	100.0%
Single race				
White	196,817,552	63.7	211,460,626	75.1
Black or African American	37,685,848	12.2	34,658,190	12.3
American Indian and Alaska Native	2,247,098	.7	2,475,956	0.9
Asian	14,465,124	4.7	10,242,998	3.6
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	481,576	0.15	398,835	0.1
Two or more races	5,966,481	1.9	6,826,228	2.4
Some other race	604,265	.2	15,359,073	5.5
Hispanic or Latino	50,477,594	16.3	35,305,818	12.5

NOTE: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding and because Hispanics may be of any race and are therefore counted under more than one category.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: National Population Estimates; Decennial Census.

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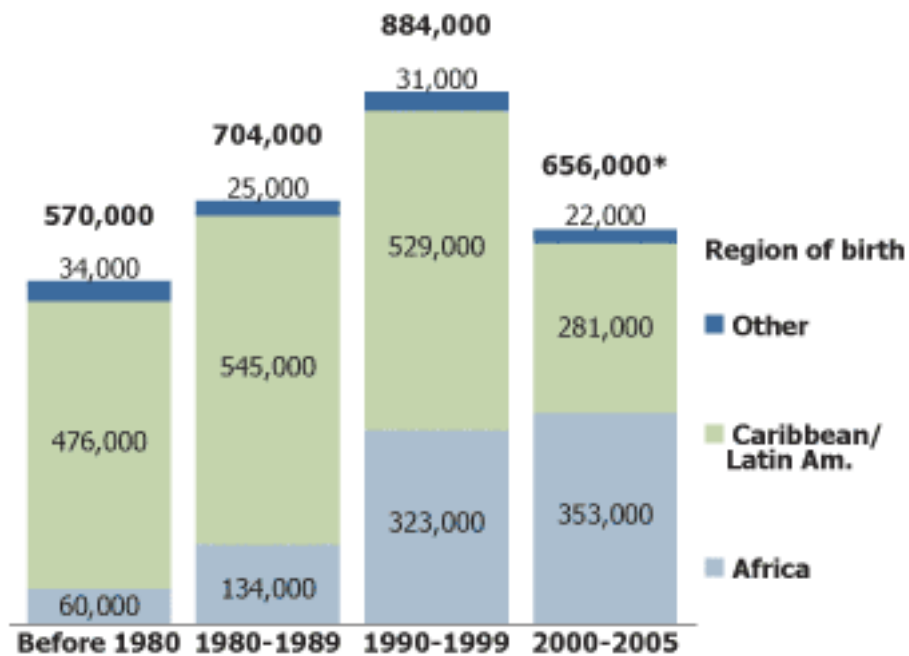
Due to the similar SES of blacks and Hispanics, they are often in direct competition, even at the local level, for resources and government aid. The result being a heightened tension between the two groups and a marked disapproval from the black population of Latino immigrants and immigration policy favoring Latinos. For example, there was much backlash surrounding the “Wet Foot, Dry Foot” policy for Cubans compared to the relatively less accommodating treatment of Haitian (Black) immigrants. The Dream Act, in particular, has produced a great amount of dismay among the black Community. The writer for the Milwaukee drum captures the discontent in his article, *I have a Dream Too! Are Blacks Getting Screwed Again?*. He writes,

“We already loose out jobs to our Hispanic brothers and sisters as it is right now. How much more can WE afford to give? With unemployment in Milwaukee already at 53% for blacks, what do you think this DREAM ACT will do to help US? We are still waiting on our 40 acres and a mule, let alone jobs, and access to post-secondary education. So something has to give.”

A more recent phenomenon linking African Americans/ Blacks to immigration is the influx of foreign-born Blacks. More foreign-born blacks have arrived recently (1980-present) from the Caribbean, Latin America, and Africa than ever before, causing a shift in the African American identity. Whereas before being Black in America only meant having roots in slavery,

African Americans in the U.S. now have different backgrounds, ethnicities, cultures, and speak different languages due to immigration. New York City, particularly, is a hub for foreign-born Black immigrants such as Dominicans, Jamaicans, Nigerians etc..

Timing of Entry for Foreign-Born Blacks by Region of Birth, 2005



*6-year period

Note: The African American/black population includes black Hispanics and people who identified as black alone or in combination with another race. These data represent the mid-point of a range of estimates based on the American Community Survey.

Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of the 2005 American Community Survey.

As one can see, immigration and immigration policy has affected and involved the African American population in the U.S. tremendously. Not only is it forcing this community to take a stance in the policy debate, but also immigration is restructuring the category of African America/Black directly by including previously absent groups.

Sources

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